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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet answers questions concerning the Puerto Rican student in the Anglo school situation. Problems arising from cultural and linguistic differences are explored and suggestions to help teachers appraise and modify their own expectations concerning the child and his native culture are offered. (RL)

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Mucho Gusto en Conocerte

(Happy to Meet You)

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Materials for Teachers

Introduction

During the last 20 years, there has been a continuous influx of Puerto Ricans to the mainland. Contrary to the expectations of government officials, this influx is still taking place. As a result, our private and public schools are faced with a growing number of Puerto Rican students enrolling in our schools.

To many teachers and administrators this presents a new problem in education, not only because of the different language, but also because of the cultural differences of the students. Teachers need help in understanding the needs and background of Puerto Rican students. This material was developed to help stimulate a desire to learn more about our Puerto Rican "amigos."

Meet Your New Puerto Rican Students

Race: All shades of the color spectrum are represented in the Puerto Rican population. The main streams of the Puerto Ricans are Spanish, Black, Indian and French.

Language: Puerto Ricans speak Spanish. Most educated Puerto Ricans speak some English with a degree of some fluency.

Religion: Catholicism is the predominant religion of the island, but you will often find that Puerto Ricans do not attend church regularly.

Diet: The Puerto Rican diet is strongly influenced by European cuisine, predominantly Spanish and French. There is also Indian and African influence.

Music: The Puerto Rican music has a definite rhythm. Dancing is a favorite form of entertainment.

Entertainment: Family-centered parties are the favorite form of entertainment.

Sex Roles: Male and female sex roles are clearly defined. Recently this value has undergone some changes due to influence from the mainland.

Facts About Puerto Rican Students Enrolled in Mainland Schools

- All Puerto Rican children are citizens of the United States. Puerto Ricans were granted American citizenship in 1917.
- All Puerto Rican children speak Spanish as their mother tongue. Depending upon their educational background they may or may not have been exposed to the English language. Even formal study of English does not assure that they can understand or speak English well enough to be able to function in an Anglo classroom situation.
- Many of the Puerto Rican children come directly from small agricultural communities in Puerto Rico to large industrial communities of the mainland.
- Puerto Rican children come from a tropical climate (84 to 87 degrees all year-round) to face mainland changes in seasons in their new environment.

- Most Puerto Rican children come from the "poor" class in Puerto Rico. Because Puerto Rico belonged to Spain for over 400 years, a caste system still exists in Puerto Rico (rich, middle, poor).
- Traditionally Puerto Rican boys and girls are treated differently according to their sex.

  Example: The Puerto Rican boy is considered a "man" from the day he is born. He is given a great deal of liberty and responsibility in:

  a. Caring for the females in the family.
  b. Taking over the role of the father in his absence. This can even mean leaving school at an early age and going to work in order to provide for the family.
  c. Defending the family honor at all times.

  Example: If a sister or younger brother gets into a fight in school, the older brother feels it is his duty to intercede for his siblings.
- Most Puerto Rican parents coming to the mainland have a 4th to 6th grade level of education. Many of them are illiterate in Spanish. Education in Puerto Rico was not provided or considered necessary for the poor until recently. Therefore, many of the Puerto Rican parents on the mainland have little understanding of education because of their own lack of opportunity in Puerto Rico. This does not mean, however, that they are not interested in the education of their children. Puerto Rican parents, like Anglo parents, want the best for their children. However, Puerto Rican parents *rely heavily* on the schools and educators to provide their children with the necessary guidance for their development. Most Puerto Rican parents feel this is the task of the school, *not* the home.

Questions Most Often Asked by Teachers and Administrators of or about Puerto Rican Children and Which May Cause Misunderstanding

What is your name?

This presents one of the first problems encountered by the Puerto Rican children upon their arrival at mainland schools. It is not unusual to have a Puerto Rican write down four names when signing a paper.

Example: Maria Dolores Medina Rivera. The reason for the name is that Puerto Ricans still use the Spanish name system which carries both the mother's and the father's last names.

Example:

Maria's father—Juan Medina Torres

Maria's mother (before marriage)—Carlota Rivera Ortiz

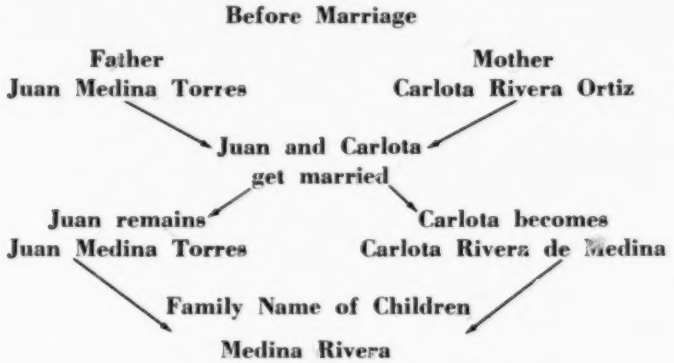
When Maria's mother married she substituted her husband's name

for her mother's name (Ortiz), however she still kept her own father's name (Rivera), thus becoming Carlota Rivera de Medina (*de* means *of*).

The father remained Juan Medina Torres (the man's name does not change with marriage).

From the marriage of Juan Medina Torres to Carlota Rivera Ortiz we have the *Medina Rivera* family and their children will bear these two names which are their father's and mother's paternal names in that order. These are the names that appear on their birth certificates and the way they would sign their names in Puerto Rico.

Example: Maria Dolores Medina Rivera



However, in Anglo schools Maria Dolores Medina Rivera should be registered as Maria Dolores Medina.

Last Name	First Name	Middle Name
Medina	Maria	Dolores

Where is your birth certificate?

It is not unusual for a Puerto Rican family to move to the U. S. leaving behind all family records, if any exist. It is not relevant for the Puerto Rican family to be thinking in terms of records which they might need upon arrival on the mainland. Often the move to the mainland is a sudden one, without a great deal of preparation and planning.

Therefore, when a Puerto Rican child comes to your school without a birth certificate, the school should be responsible for obtaining the records that the parents are often unable to secure.

Records can be obtained from the following address:

Division of Demographic Registry and Vital Statistics
Department of Health
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00908

(To obtain a birth certificate, a money order for 50 cents is necessary.)

Where are your school records? (report cards, vaccination certificate, record transfers)

A Puerto Rican child may or may not bring a report card to the new school. In cases where the child brings a report card, the help of a bilingual person should be sought for proper translation and assessment of academic achievement. Ability to speak English should not be a criterion in determining a student's grade placement.

In the event that the child does not bring a report card, evaluation of the child should be done by a bilingual person. A nonverbal math test where language is not needed for interpretation would be extremely helpful when there is no bilingual person available. This may give you a guideline for grade placement.

Why were you absent from school yesterday? Where is your excuse?

The excuse has to be written in English in order for the teachers to understand, but you should remember that many Puerto Rican parents are illiterate in their own language and many of them cannot speak or read English. Furthermore, sending excuses to school when a child is absent is not a part of Puerto Rican school rules and regulations. Therefore, some Puerto Rican parents may not send excuses. The child should not be held responsible for the excuse and a home visit can be helpful.

If a doctor's excuse is required by the school district, please keep in mind that the Puerto Rican parents are not used to taking children to the doctor for what appears to be a minor illness (mumps, colds, measles). Puerto Rican parents still rely on home remedies. This stems from the fact that there are few doctors in the small communities where they came from in Puerto Rico.

Two of the most frequent causes for school absence are taking care of younger children in the family and using children as spokesmen when the need for English comprehension arises within the family. Children who perform these duties feel proud to be of help to their parents and negative remarks by adults create a conflict of values for the child. If you are faced with this problem in your classroom, please arrange to discuss this with the parents and not with the child.

What happens to the school notices that are sent home?

Whether these notes are written in English or in Spanish there is a possibility that they may not reach the home or that the parents cannot read them. Permission slips sent home are usually signed by the father,

since the man makes all the decisions in the Puerto Rican culture. In the absence of the father, and even if the father is present but is illiterate, the family relies on the older children to sign the note. If there is any question concerning this matter, we recommend home visits.

The concept of "*mañana*" (tomorrow) is typical of the Puerto Rican culture, but in the Anglo culture mañana might be too late since for Puerto Ricans mañana means any time.

Where is your homework?

It is unrealistic for teachers to expect most Puerto Rican children to do or bring back homework assignments. The home conditions in many instances are not conducive to doing school work. Crowded family living conditions are prevalent among Puerto Ricans. This may be caused by: (a) poor housing conditions; (b) a large number of children or (c) relatives and friends living together.

The Puerto Rican concept of devotion and loyalty to older family members often explains the presence of grandparents living at home. Children are taught to respect and listen to all older family members.

Many Puerto Rican parents are unable to give their children any kind of assistance when it comes to school work. Books and magazines are seldom available in Puerto Rican homes.

The Puerto Rican Newcomer in Your School System

Have you ever stopped to think what has happened to a Puerto Rican child before you meet him or her for the first time? Here is a child who comes from a small agricultural community, a tropical climate, a Spanish speaking country, a familiar environment and neighborhood.

The family decides to come to the continental U. S. A. After only a three and a half hour plane ride, the Puerto Rican is in a large industrial city where English is spoken, a language he cannot understand, in a different climate and in an unfamiliar environment. After arriving at the airport, the child's first exposure to the new culture, he is taken to his new home in the U. S. A. The home might be in a Spanish community or a mixed minority-group community. Here the child is likely to be with relatives and old family friends. This does not seem to be a very marked transition because the child can still relate to the people around.

Therefore, in many cases, the child's first day of school is the first real exposure to an all Anglo environment. The experience of this day will have an effect on the way in which the child will perceive school.

Suggestions for Helping the Puerto Rican Newcomer in Your School

- Whenever possible have a Spanish speaking person meet this child for the first time. Learn from this person the correct pronunciation of the child's name. For example: Jesús and Angel are very common Puerto Rican names. However, the pronunciation of these names is different from the English pronunciation.
- The Spanish speaking person could be the teacher of English as a second language, a bilingual aide, an older Puerto Rican child who is bilingual, or a volunteer from the community who is bilingual.
- This bilingual person should orient the child to the school and school facilities before taking him or her to meet the new teacher and classmates.
- This bilingual person should also orient parents or whoever brings the child to school concerning school programs, policies and what is expected of the child and of them as parents.
- If the school does not engage in a special program for non-English speaking children, provisions should be made to help the child learn English and adjust to the new environment.

  Examples: PAL system—assign a buddy to work with the child on an individual basis.
  Volunteer help—seek the help of a community person to come on a regular basis to give individual instruction. College students majoring in Spanish sometimes look for opportunities to work with Spanish speaking people.

- Teachers of Spanish speaking children should enroll in conversational Spanish courses if they are available.
- Have Puerto Rican children teach Anglo classmates one word a day in Spanish.
- Allow Puerto Rican children to teach you some phrases in Spanish.
- Secure simple Puerto Rican games and songs that can be used in the classroom.
- Encourage Puerto Rican children to share the culture of their country with Anglo counterparts. This could be done by bringing musical instruments, records, foods, costumes to school.
- Encourage Puerto Rican children to bring their parents to school and show a sincere interest in meeting them.
- Puerto Rican parents would welcome and appreciate your home visit. It might be necessary to have an interpreter.
- Start working with the Puerto Rican child by using something in which he or she can be successful.

Examples: Have the child draw a picture of the place where he or she came from in Puerto Rico.

Or work together on a simple math problem.

- Involve the child in classroom activities which do not require language usage.

  Examples: Dispense papers. Erase blackboards. Sharpen pencils.
- The first time you meet a Puerto Rican child, try to remember:
  a. The child will have trouble communicating with you in English until he or she masters the second language.
  b. The child is used to different foods.
  c. The child comes to you with a different culture.
  d. The child may never have seen a crowded city and smoky skies. The child is used to green trees and brilliant flowers.
  e. The child has never seen snow or worn winter clothing.
  f. The child will need time to adjust to a new environment.
- Accept the child the way he is when he comes to you.
- Do not stereotype Puerto Ricans. Each Puerto Rican child is an individual.

Suggested Readings

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Textbooks, dictionaries and books about Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans and by Puerto Rican authors, can be purchased:

Las Americas Publishing Co.
152 East 23rd Street
New York, New York 10000

Armada Foreign Books
2 Washington Square Village
Room 14U
New York, New York 10012

Batey Book Distributing Co.
69 Irving Avenue
New York, New York 10003

La Libreria
248 East 50th Street
New York, New York 10000

Spanish Books Distributors
103 Crosby Street
(Near 8th Street)
New York, New York 10000

Spanish Books Corporation of America
610—5th Avenue
(Rockefeller Center at 49th Street)
New York, New York 10000